

Issued by: Art reSource South Africa
For: Bianca Baldi
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Angle: Zero Latitude by Bianca Baldi comes to Johannesburg

Bianca Baldi explores explorers

Zero Latitude comes to Johannesburg after successful debut at the Berlin Biennale.

Exhibition opens at the Goethe Institute, 119 Jan Smuts Avenue- Parkwood, Johannesburg on the 2nd of October at 18:30.

Facebook Event: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1467824700158978/>

Bianca Baldi's evocative exhibition project *Zero Latitude* opens at the Goethe Institute, Johannesburg in October 2014. The second exhibition of this travelling project, the body of work consists of installation elements and a video projection. Invited by Curator Juan Gaitan as one of four South Africans to show work at the recent 8th Berlin Biennale, Baldi's *Zero Latitude* is a walk through a moment in colonial history told through a peculiar historical artefact.

Central to the work is the (heavy) portable explorer's bed produced by Louis Vuitton as a commission for the explorer Pierre Savorgnan de Brazza for his 1905 expedition to the Congo. The trunk contained a collapsible bed frame, a hair mattress, two wool blankets and four sheets and was designed especially for his expedition by the now renowned luxury goods brand.

Baldi's installation shows a video of characters unpacking and assembling the Vuitton-made explorer trunk, and a large-scale print work which foregrounds a painted landscape which Felix Nadar, the well-known Parisian portraitist used as a background for a famous portrait of De Brazza.

Baldi's research for this project has been extensive. Several years of work took her to the Henry Morten Stanley archive at Museum of Central Africa, in Tervuren Belgium, the Equatorim of the Duisburg Zoo in Germany and the Nadar Archive, Paris, France to engage with historical depictions of DeBrazza from the late 19th Century and early 20th Century to get a further sense of his character and to inspire the sartorial styling of the film.

The artist also travelled to the Louis Vuitton Heritage Warehouse in Paris, France, where she engaged with the resident historians to study and photograph the object at the centre of this project.

In the exhibition, the artist unpacks a series of 'findings' related to Brazza's route down the Congo river, conscious of the symbolic capital, as well as power of subtle decontextualisation and erasure. The installation simultaneously transfixes and contests the representation of a mythologized time and place and its subsequent narration. Not a linear exploration of history, Baldi's work places this strange and beautiful artefact at the centre of the analysis. It evokes any number of connections, being the stark contrast of the international luxury design brand and the legacy of colonialism on the continent, to the sheer incongruity of the notion that any one

man, with a bed on his back (or the backs of others) literally walking through the unmapped territories could have had such an impact on the world today

Says Baldi: “Congo is a representation of Africa in the West. Equatorial Africa has become the trope of sub-saharan Africa on which popular mythology of the continent is built. From the earliest written accounts of explorers like Henry Morton Stanley who mapped the Congo River and documented his journey in his book, *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), to the countless works of film and literature, the Congo River does not only provide a physical point of access to central Africa from the Atlantic but also an imaginary access for the Western world.”

Sean O’Toole writes about the piece; “Growing out of an archival research project initiated in 2012, Bianca Baldi’s *Zero Latitude* installation essays a pivotal moment in late-nineteenth European and African history by minutely focusing on a particular historical artefact: a custom-made portable explorer’s bed produced by Louis Vuitton, founder of the Parisian luggage goods brand. Orchestrated as a walk-through installation, *Zero Latitude*’s variously showcases this luxury commodity – equal parts relic, sculptural object, historical cipher and performative prop – as a way of addressing a period of colonial adventurism that both prefigured and decisively contributed to the irreversible outcomes of the Berlin Conference of 1884-85.” (It was at the Berlin conference that the colonial powers effectively carved up the African continent between them.)

Says Baldi, “There’s a tension between the real place and the imaginary one, and through making one connection, you come across others – such as the archetypical character of the explorer, de Brazza, his cultural and consumable baggage, as well as the histories of the Congo River.”

This will be the second showing of *Zero Latitude*, the first showing of the walkthrough installation was at the 8th Berlin Biennale. Curated by Juan A. Gaitián. The Biennale’s curatorial focus was on the unstable relationship between experienced and scientific historiography and thus included artwork such as Baldi’s which offers different readings of history and the mechanisms of its current representation.

Baldi was invited as one of 58 artists from around the world to mark and investigate history and its fragments. *Zero Latitude* (2014) was commissioned and co-produced by the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art with the support from the Goethe-Institute.

Baldi grew up in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa and went on to completed a BA (FA) in studio practice and theory at the University of Cape Town’s Michaelis School of Fine Art in 2007. Baldi was a guest student at the Università IUAV in Venice, Italy in 2010 and more recently completed her studies at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Career highlights include exhibiting on the 8th Berlin Biennale, selected group and solo exhibitions in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Frankfurt, Berlin, Naples and Venice.

In 2013 Baldi collaborated with Bridget Baker in an exhibition project and book entitled ACT I: AEROLITHE ILLUSION by Bureau de Cinéma Africain (ABC). The book includes texts by Clare Butcher and Bettina Malcomess.

2014 saw the launch of Baldi's publication online project Zero Latitude: A User's Manual. Edited by Bianca Baldi including texts by Clare Butcher and Sean O'Toole with graphic design by Marco Balesteros.

Zero Latitude (2014)

www.zero-latitude.net

HD video, colour, silent; stretched printed Voile on wooden frame and print elements

Bianca Baldi's project Zero Latitude, 2014 was commissioned and co-produced by the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art. 29 May-3 August 2014. With the support of Goethe-Institut, Johannesburg.

Thanks to Louis Vuitton Malletier, Paris; Musée du quai Branly, Paris; Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine, Montigny-le-Bretonneux; Kadist Art Foundation

Film Credits

Assistant director: Emilien Abibou D.O.P : Olivier Guerbois Assistant camera: Davy Bauret Gaffer: Félix Marmorat Post-production: Christopher Hummel

Character i : Julien Peltier

Character ii: Vincent Berthe

Filmed at the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, France.